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## February is a good time to focus on heart health

**Rhoda Brosnan**  
**Rx for Health**

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On Dec. 30, 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson issued the first presidential proclamation declaring February as American Heart Month. He urged the people of the United States, “to give heed to the nationwide problem of the heart and blood vessel diseases, and to support the programs required to bring about its solution.”

In 2004, the American Heart Association initiated the Go Red for Women campaign to raise awareness that heart disease is as much a disease of women as it is of men. Despite these national efforts, heart disease — including coronary artery disease, stroke, heart failure and irregular heart rhythms — remains the No. 1 cause of death in women today. Fortunately, despite this daunting statistic, heart disease is not inevitable.

What can you do to decrease your risk of cardiovascular disease?

The first thing to do is to identify your risk by answering the following questions:

- u Does heart disease run in your family?
  - u Nearly two out of every three U.S. women older than 20 are overweight. Are you?
  - u Do you have high blood pressure?
  - u Are you diabetic?
  - u Have you been told your cholesterol is too high?
  - u Do you smoke or are you exposed to regular secondhand smoke?
- If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” you are at higher risk for developing heart disease. Fortunately, there are many ways to reduce your risk, starting this month.
- u Find a way, if you are not already active, to exercise comfortably. The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking, five days a week or 25 minutes of vigorous exercise, such as running or biking, three days a week.
  - u Strive for a more hearthealthy diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meat and fish and low in salt and refined sugars.
  - u Give up smoking and encourage your family members to do the same.
  - u Finally, if you have not had a routine check-up with a physician in a year, schedule one to discuss your risk in more detail.

If you have high blood pressure, diabetes or elevated cholesterol that requires treatment, take an active role in their management. Follow your weight and make adjustments in your diet before you gain another 5 pounds. Check your blood pressure and glucose regularly and record the results to share with your provider. And, keep a record of your cholesterol and how it’s doing over time.

Finally, if you have symptoms that are concerning for a heart attack, such as chest pain or pressure, arm or jaw discomfort, the sudden onset of shortness of breath or nausea, do not wait. Call 911 immediately.

For more information on the prevention and recognition of heart disease in women, visit the American Heart Association website this month, [www.heart.org/HEARTORG](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG).

Dr. Rhoda B. Brosnan is a boardcertified general cardiologist with Asheville Cardiology Associates and a member of the Western Carolina Medical Society. She is the course director for cardiology for the Asheville Regional Campus of the UNC School of Medicine.

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